DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 242 608 SO 015 509

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TITLE The Theme of Education of Women in "The Revolution," 1868-1870.
PUB DATE 3 Nov 83
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Midyear Conference of the American Educational Research Association Research on Women and Education Special Interest Group (9th, Tempe, AZ, November 3-5, 1983).
PUB TYPE Historical Materials (060) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Policy; *Feminism; Higher Education; Journalism; Periodicals; Political Issues; *Sex Bias; *Sex Fairness; Social History; United States History; *Womens Education

ABSTRACT

A feminist newspaper, "The Revolution," published between 1868 and 1870 filled a void in the popular press of the time, proclaiming the necessity of equal rights for women in all areas of life. Owned by Susan B. Anthony and edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the paper repeatedly emphasized the importance of education of women. Four major themes were stressed: the necessity of opening men's colleges to women, the failure of wealthy women to fund women's colleges, the need for professional education of women, and the need for equal pay for women teachers. (LP)

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The Theme of Education of Women in "The Revolution", 1868-1870

Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Special Interest Group:Research on Women and Education

Arizona State University, November 3, 1983

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SO 015 509

Hailed as "the most famous document in the history of feminism" (Kraditor, p.182), the Declaration of Sentiments, proclaimed at the 1848 Woman's Rights Convention held at Seneca Falls, New York, detailed woman's unequal status in society in matters such as divorce, religion, property rights, suffrage and education. The Declaration's inclusion of the sentence "He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her" indicated that the early feminists deemed education to be one of the essential elements in their struggle for equality.

Not until over 200 years after the founding of Harvard College were women admitted into American institutions of higher education. That event did not occur until 1837 when Oberlin College formally admitted four women students. Despite a rather late start, by 1870, when the United States Commissioner of Education first began to publish comprehensive statistics, the official estimate for women students of higher education was "some 11,000, or approximately one woman for every four men" (Newcomer, p.19).

Although higher educational opportunities for women had increased dramatically since the 1848 issuing of the Declaration of Sentiments, there was a considerable amount of negative sentiment about educated women in America. From 1820 onwards "the Cult of True Womanhood" which espoused four cardinal virtues for women, "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" (Welter, p.152)pervaded and

influenced American society. The popular press published countless articles delineating woman's incapacity to learn and proclaiming the innate intellectual differences between the two sexes.

Anthropologists solemnly propounded that the brains of women were smaller than those of men, medical doctors penned articles predicting severe outbreaks of brain fever among women college students and even the novelist Henry James produced an article opposing the higher education of women on the grounds that "Learning and wisdom do not become her" (James, p.279).

Because the popular press of the time was either scornful or ignored woman's struggle for equality feminist journals began to make an appearance. The main function of these feminist publications was to proclaim the necessity of equal rights for women in all areas of life and they served as an ongoing forum for the injustices outlined in the Declaration of Sentiments.

The most famous of these early feminist periodicals was first published in New York City on January 8, 1868. It was called "The Revolution" and it was owned and managed by Susan B. Anthony and edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The 16 page weekly reveled in presenting radical ideas and controversy. It was a staunch advocate of equal pay and employment opportunities for women, it attacked church and

state policies on divorce and daringly discussed prostitution and the double standard. "The Revolution" was an enthusiastic promoter of the accomplishments of women, from noting that it was a woman, Catharine Greene, rather than Eli Whitney, who invented the cotton gin (Revolution, April 30, 1868, p.157) to celebrating the fact that there were 44 women postmasters in the state of Connecticut (Revolution, June 4, 1868, p.348). The paper heralded the triumphs of women, wrung its hands over inequities, promoted activism on many fronts and provided information that could be found no place else at that time.

One of the major issues addressed in almost every issue of the paper was that of the education of women. It appeared as the subject of front page stories, brief end of column fillers, letters to the editor, reports from foreign correspondents, and in reprints from other magazines and newspapers. Although the paper occasionally reported on topics of general educational interest such as its opposition to corporeal punishment in the schools or the strides made in the education of freed slaves, the great mass of its educational material centered on the education of women.

There were many short columns celebrating the accomplishments of educated women past and present. One such entry related that there was a woman professor of Mathematics at the University of Bologna in the early 1700's

and "The Revolution" commented "If in the 18th Century it was not thought too revolutionary to give a woman a professorship in the male institution; why in this century - the enlightened, the progressive 19th, should it be considered too revolutionary to give woman a mere scholarship in similar institutions?" (Revolution, August 27, 1868, p.124).

The paper was ever alert to injustices against women and in one column chastised the New York Public Library for permitting only male public school teachers to use its reading room (Revolution, February 10, 1870, p.92). Even women's colleges did not escape its watchful eye and a writer reporting on a public speaking contest at Vassar described the great attention paid to dress by the female scholars and commented "We want a college to educate women not pretty toys and well dressed dolls, but women who with large heart and developed brain will live for their sex and their country" (Revolution, December 23, 1869, p.389).

From a reading of every issue of the paper published during its three year existence, four major themes were evident: the necessity of opening men's colleges to women students; the failure of women to fund women's colleges; the professional education of women; and pay inequities for women teachers.

The theme which provoked the most attention from the paper was the need to open male colleges and universities to women students. Prominent in every issue were notices or

articles announging that more and more colleges were admitting women. The struggle to achieve co-education at the University of Michigan was reported in great detail and when it finally admitted women "The Revolution" trumpeted "Glorious Star of the North! Michigan always was a bright jewel in the coronet of republican liberty" (Revolution, January 20, 1870, p.42).

Not all the news on the topic was so euphoric and the failures received attention as well, especially Cornell's protracted opposition to women students.

A second major theme, although of less importance than the admission of women to higher education but obviously of some concern tc Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who wrote most of the paper's material, was the criticism of wealthy women who willed their fortunes to male institutions. Usually the articles on the subject were captioned with titles such as "Not Again", "As Usual", or "Mcre Mistaken Charity" and reported that some dowager had bequeathed $30,000 to a Theological Seminary or $10,000 to an all male college. Stanton was not reluctant to editorialize about this practice and in one instance wrote "What is the reason that these rich women never remember their own sex? It is a little remarkable that so many women of wealth leave bequests to all these societies and colleges for men, but never leave anything for the education and elevation of women" (Revolution, June 4, 1868, p.342).

The publicizing of the accomplishments of professional women was a third prominent theme. Much was made of women who

had already achieved a college degree and were now succeeding in traditionally male professions. Medical school education and the achievements of women doctors drew the largest amount of published acclaim. "The Revolution" was replete with announcements such as the one in 1870 which noted that the New England Female Medical Academy graduated 74 women (Revolution, January 6, 1870, p.12). To further encourage women into the medical profession the paper reprinted an article which reported that in Philadelphia in 1868 there were at least 6 women doctors who reported incomes of over $2000 a year and that in New York City one woman doctor earned over $15,000 a year (Revolution, February 5, 1868, p.71).

A fourth major theme was the pay inequity within the teaching profession. In an article in the second issue of "The Revolution", Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote "what is the reason that today a large majority of the teachers in our schools are women? Is it because women are better teachers than men? Not at all, simply because they teach at half price" (Revolution, January 15, 1868, p.25). The issue surfaced repeatedly in the paper's three year history. One long front page story detailed state by state the salaries paid to male teachers and those to female teachers. In every instance the women teachers were paid less than their male counterparts and in 1860 several states such as Vermont paid their male teachers two and a half times the salary of the female teacher. This gross inequity evoked many letters to the editor from

women teachers or from sympathetic townspeople such as a man from Urbana, Ohio who told of a woman teacher who worked for $40 a month "In a small, illy lighted, poorly ventilated room, with some 55 scholars to teach, while they pay a heavy, back-headed, sensual looking, vulgar mouthed ignoramus $60 a month to teach about 20-25 scholars. He has a light, airy room and everything is comfortable."(Revolution, February 18, 1869, p.101). Another reader, commenting on similar injustices in Rochester, New York, concluded her letter by stating "It strikes me also very forcibly that it is about time for women, by the combination of numbers and pluck, to have a recognized voice in these affairs. Why are not women members of Boards of Education? Why are they never found among the examining Committees?" (Revolution, Jualy 9, 1869, p.3).

Throughout its thraee year publishing history "The Revolution" was not only asking the same questions as the reader from Rochester but was providing the answers. The paper enumerated specific goals from women's education and suggested ways in which those goals might be attained. It took great pride in proclaiming the achievements of educated women and was a rich source of basic information from announcing the opening of a school of telegraphy to women to documenting wage inequities for women teachers in cities and towns all over the United States.

Despite its valiant attempts to reach a wider audience,

its circulation never peaked above 3,000 and its operating deficit grew larger each month. In May 1870 Stanton and Anthony sold the paper and severed their connection with it.

"The Revolution" was a short lived but significant publication. It advocated the education and advancement of women and was a forceful and lively voice in informing society that woman's place was not just in the home, but in the colleges, universities and the professions.

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